

# Chikufikani

(A pink day mask from the Pemba area)

## Themes

- 1) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 2) Hypocrisy/split personality/duplicity
- 3) Murder
- 4) Recent politics

## Etymology

**Chikufikani** means, 'It comes your way' (referring to the multiparty system).



## Description

The character was introduced into *gule wamkulu* in 1993, when a multiparty system was looking ever more likely. Both the government and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) had done all they could to discourage its introduction. Nevertheless, in 1993 two new parties were established: the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) and the United Democratic Front (UDF). On 15 March 1993, President Kamuzu Banda announced a referendum to be held on 14 June of the same year, in order to let the people decide on the future of multiparty politics. In the lead-up to the referendum, numerous political rallies were held by both political sides. Soon after Independence, *gule wamkulu* had become an integral part of the MCP political meetings as a way of enlivening the gatherings and attracting crowds. During this transition period, other parties copied the MCP and invited *gule* to take part in their rallies.

The new character of **Chikufikani** was created to strengthen support for the multiparty system, which was initially unwelcome in the Central region. A strong, pink, square face topped with an erect black sisal hair lock on the forehead represented the new parties. The pink mask (35 cm.) portrays a newcomer, but not a stranger, since his face has tribal marks. He is shown as a youthful but wise man with receding black hair and three wrinkles on either side of his broad forehead. His nose is strong and aquiline. Labial lines frame a powerful mouth, full of teeth, which seems to claim legitimacy. The eyes are sharp and fiery, signifying the character's fight for acceptance. His aristocratic look is reflected in a straight moustache, noble goatee and long sideburns made of

Samango monkey skin. His large ears are pricked, to demonstrate his ability to listen to the people's complaints. The headgear of the mask is made of tatters, alleging that he comes from the ancestral world. **Chikufikani** wears smart European clothes (trousers and shirt) and carries a staff and a flywhisk, to rival Kamuzu Banda.

As he enters the *bwalo*, **Chikufikani** stumbles and rolls over. He falls where the women dance and where the men stand to watch the performance. On entering the arena, he herds the women and sits down at their feet before collapsing. He forces the drummers to shift their drums elsewhere and collapses again where the drums were standing. **Chikufikani** does not swerve his feet but accompanies the women as they sway their hips to the rhythm of the *chisamba*. The male choir sing, "You children, in this country out there, a strange disease has struck! It has no name! A dangerous disease of this type is foreign. It is called, 'It comes your way.' Do not tell anyone, no. (People answer:) When it reaches you, how can you refuse? When it reaches you, we will see, (how we can refuse). Mr. It comes your way."

Both the pantomime and the song illustrate a well known Chewa proverb: "*Chaona mnzako chapita, mawa chili kwa iwe – What has befallen your friend is gone, tomorrow it will befall you,*" or "*The bad luck of your neighbour will afflict you tomorrow.*" This proverb can also be interpreted to mean, "*When your neighbour makes a blunder, do not mock him, for tomorrow you may make your own mistake.*" This lesson is drawn from the life experience of Mr. Mlombwa Phiri, who was the local MCP party chairman in the Dedza district at the end of 1992. He was conducting a strong campaign against the multiparty system. Mr. Mlombwa was so dedicated to the cause of the government and the MCP that he became involved in subversive and criminal activities, which he then attributed to the advocates of the multiparty system. In the local party meetings, he warned the population against the dangers of multiparty democracy and threatened those who were in favour or showed support for it. At the instigation of Mlombwa or other MCP officials, multiparty partisans or sympathizers were brought to the Dedza police station on several occasions in 1992. They were casually released without charge. This 'irresponsible' behaviour of the police officer in charge did not remain unnoticed. A few months later, the same policeman was ambushed at Mlombwa's residence at night and shot in the back. Mr. Mlombwa was jailed as a possible suspect. He was tried, found guilty and sentenced to a life term in prison. None of his friends in high places could commute this sentence. Mlombwa remained incarcerated until 1998 and died of diabetes at home in Dedza in January 1999, soon after his release. At the news of his arrest in 1993, people of Dedza recognised in his case the well known proverb quoted above. Mr. Mlombwa boycotted the multiparty system because he feared that it would bring war and anarchy to the country. Yet he himself was willing to commit murder in order to maintain the ruling party and his own position. The mime of **Chikufikani** dramatises his downfall through the repeated falls, his rudeness to women and his despotic attacks on the drummers.

Mr. Mlombwa's hostility to the multiparty system in his political speeches is expressed in the first part of the song. The second part reveals that the population is sympathetic to change. This is also suggested in the way **Chikufikani** dances in unison with the women at the end of his performance. He already carries the insignia of power (staff and flywhisk) of the ruling party. The reference to the proverb here voices a warning for the new parties. It tells them that if they win the referendum and the general election, and succeed in dethroning the ruling government and the MCP, they should not forget that when their time comes they will also be replaced by others.

The character of **Chikufikani** cleverly combines the advent of the multiparty system and the downfall of the old Kamuzu Banda regime as it is reflected in the case of Mr. Mlombwa Phiri. Mlombwa's example provides a test case for inculcating tolerance and reminding the population of human frailty.

### **Song**

*"Ana inu, kunja kuno kwagwa nthenda ya chilendo! Yopanda dzina tate! Awa ngakwina chinthenda choterecho **Chikufikani** tate. Musati munene toto tate! Kodi chikafikira iwe ukakana bwanji tate? **Chikufikani** inuyo, tione kukana kwake tate **Chikufikani!**"*

### **Source**

Interviews in 1993, 2000, 2001 and 2002